

May 9, 2008

TO: Chief School Administrators
Charter School Lead Persons

FROM: Lucille E. Davy
Commissioner

SUBJECT: *Learnia* Formative Assessment Resources for 2008-2009

As part of its recent comprehensive redesign of the statewide assessment system, the Department of Education (DOE) provided for a substantial grade 3-8 formative assessment component, supported by an equally substantial professional development program. This formative assessment program is called *Learnia*, and is a product of the Harcourt/Pearson Educational Measurement (PEM) company.

Approximately 55 districts participated in the *Learnia* program in 2007-2008, in response to my August 24, 2007 recruitment letter, and we believe the results are very encouraging, as do almost all the participating districts themselves. At this time, I am inviting other interested districts to take advantage of this opportunity to implement *Learnia* and its supporting professional development resources for the 2008-2009 school year and beyond.

Below you will find detailed information about implementing *Learnia*, but let me first make clear the nature and purpose of this formative assessment and professional development program. Formative assessment resources allow educators to evaluate and measure student achievement continually, in a low-pressure context, using non-secure benchmark testing forms, item pools, distractor analysis, item authoring software, and associated score reports. Formative assessment resources allow teachers to connect specific grade level indicators with specific students or groups of students. They are formative in helping teachers shape and improve instruction as teachers shape and improve student understanding.

More broadly, these formative assessment and professional development resources will help demystify assessment, especially among those teachers and administrators who see the annual statewide assessments as interruptions of their work, rather than as a part of it. Teachers naturally want to see the test questions their students got wrong or right, and the *Learnia* resources make that possible, well before those students sit down for the high stakes testing in the spring. Furthermore, the supporting professional development programs constitute an intellectually rich foundation for teachers who want to integrate a wide range of assessment practices and concepts into their regular instructional routines. We believe that using these formative assessment tools will in itself constitute professional development for teachers, but the

formal workshops and web-based supports will assure that teachers are confident about the underlying pedagogy of formative assessment, not just the technology.

For this reason, in the coming months the department and Pearson will again offer a series of regionally organized **assessment literacy workshops**, available to any interested districts on a “first come, first served” basis. Each workshop is six-hour class in Assessment Literacy designed to provide district staff with a substantive grounding in essential educational measurement concepts, as well as practical techniques and strategies for analyzing student achievement data. These classes will be limited to groups of about 60 participants each, in order to maximize the opportunities for interactive, hands-on training. Participants will study four assessment “decision points” and apply them to sample student performance data sets: the training will increase the ability of district staff to make effective use of their own assessment data and related student achievement information. Registration details will be forthcoming shortly.

Implementing *Learnia*

Learnia provides schools with a rich set of formative assessment resources that will enable teachers to adjust their instruction to meet student needs throughout the school year. These resources include pre-existing benchmark assessments, aligned to New Jersey standards, pre-existing smaller tests for diagnostic analysis of CPIs and common student errors, as well as test authoring and score reporting capabilities. *Learnia* is a web-based, comprehensive tool that will provide a wide range of timely, actionable reports to meet the specific needs of each education professional in New Jersey. *Learnia*’s answer analysis function provides information about the types of mistakes students are making, allowing teachers to develop more focused strategies to help students. The regionally organized supporting professional development program consists of four parts:

- Professional Development course on Assessment Literacy
- On-site Implementation support of the *Learnia* System
- Unlimited System Use and Data Generation
- Professional Development course designed to help NJ teacher make Instructional Decisions based on their *Learnia* Formative Assessment Results

There is **no charge to districts** for *Learnia*, but it does require a commitment by the participating district. It is our experience that *Learnia* works best when there is highly motivated, entrepreneurial leadership in each district. We can put you in touch with current New Jersey *Learnia* districts if you wish to get the benefit of their perspective and experience. *Learnia* is not a tool for evaluating teachers; it is a tool for teachers and school leaders to evaluate, analyze, and pursue student progress in mastering the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS) for language arts literacy and mathematics, in grades 3 through 8, and science at grades 4 and 8. In offering *Learnia* to districts, the department is not offering a technological cure-all, but rather a set of sophisticated tools and resources to enhance their ongoing efforts to improve curriculum and instruction. Thus, each participating district must commit to providing a strong leader or leaders within the district to guide the implementation, and to utilizing *Learnia* throughout the school year, although the focus and depth of utilization can vary widely among participating districts.

Pearson will work with districts to develop a *Learnia* implementation plan tailored to fit the individual needs of the district and managed by a designated implementation manager provided by Pearson. The implementation process will include:

- Technical Readiness Evaluation;
- Student Data Management;
- Product User Training;
- Reports Training.

How to respond to this invitation

You may obtain more information about *Learnia* at <http://newjersey.learnia.net>. We encourage you to go to the website, and click on “sign up” for 2008-2009. You will be asked to complete a brief survey about your district and confirm that you are interested in implementation. You may also contact directly Pearson representative: Scott Herr, director of Implementation Services, at 800-228-0752, ext. 5680. For any matters pertaining to the statewide assessments, please feel free to contact Timothy Peters, director, Office of State Assessments, at (609) 984-7761.

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